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"THE MAN WITH THE VIOLIN"

A PORTRAIT OF TIMOTHY COLE
FROM A PAINTING BY WYATT EATON

THE ART OF TIMOTHY COLE

BY GEORGE HOWES WHITTLE

(See page 377)

IF one expresses to Mr. Cole admiration for the wizardry of his arabesque of vibrating lines he replies simply "My line is nothing. I don't think about it; it means nothing in itself; all that matters is what I want to say and what my line expresses."

This seems a strange statement by one who has given so many years of patient study to the perfection of his line, but the apparent paradox is made plain when we understand him to mean that he is no longer hampered in the free play of his imagination by technical considerations; hand, eye and brain have been thoroughly trained to work in perfect unison.

In a musical instrument, say the violin, the strings are so attuned to one another that by vibrating them in obedience to the touch various harmonies are produced. The engraver makes the strings of his instrument as he goes along, producing his harmonies by a series of black and white lines in juxtaposition vibrating together. Facility and delicacy of hand in modulating his lines, like the touch of the musician, while essentially a matter of feeling, is also one of calculation and judgment; as Mr. Cole himself has observed "art is calculation."

This aspect of the engraver's line is suggestive of a certain decorative and æsthetic motive somewhat analogous to the effect produced by an exquisite piece of lace, the charm of which is exercised chiefly through the eye; no other of the graphic arts seems to manifest this æsthetic quality to the same extent and manner as wood-engraving.

But wood-engraving is a graphic art and a story must be told. This includes not only the delineation of the subject to the smallest detail but attention to such other technical features as tone, atmosphere and color. Thus we see still more closely the meaning of Mr. Cole's remark "All that matters is what I want to say and what my line expresses."

It would be interesting to review the work of Timothy Cole prior to his almost exclusive occupation with the European old masters, but the omission is less important in view of the fact that his style has never changed; the peculiarly individual character of his line remains virtually the same as at the beginning of his career. It is in the perception of artistic meanings and increase of power to grapple with new and difficult problems that a perception of his development must be sought. But so generally even is the quality of his engraving, and so difficult or impossible is it to distinguish between the nature of the problems presented by his various subjects, that we may well shrink from such a task. It would also be too intricate a matter to attempt to show how peculiar difficulties are overcome while still maintaining an open scale of white line, where so many engravers of less skill and power would resort to a "tightening" of the line, thus losing that vibrating and singing quality we have referred to as so charming in Cole's work. It is the determination

to maintain a true tradition of wood-engraving in white line work that renders it so difficult and triumphant an achievement to preserve essential accents in drawing, at the same time with a proper breath of generalization.

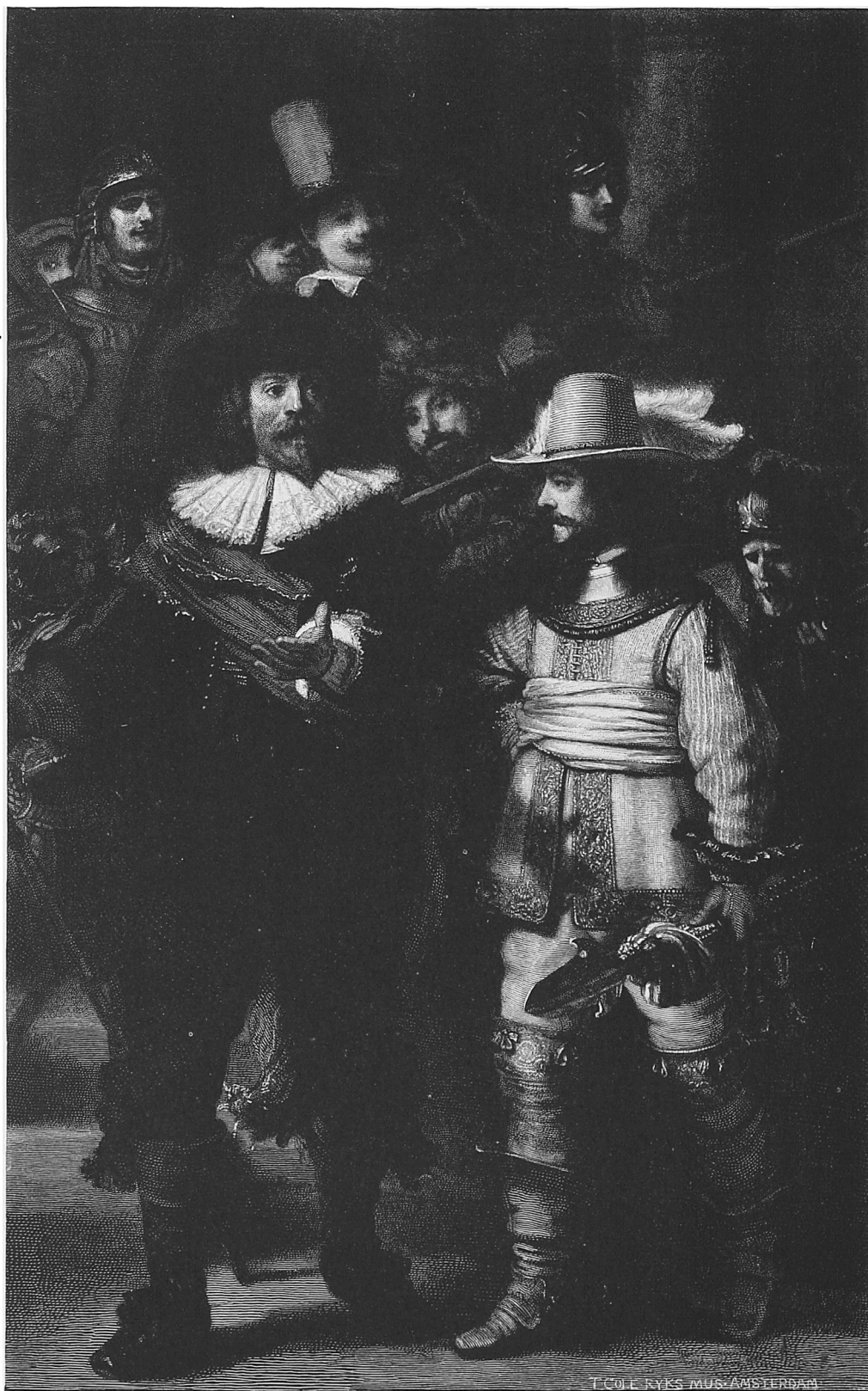
In a long list of about seventy subjects Mr. Cole covered the history of Italian painting from Cimabue to Veronese. This was a prodigious undertaking! Days and weeks were spent on preliminary studies in imperfectly lighted galleries and churches, disentangling true features in his subjects from the distortions and obscurities caused by time and neglect. Nothing was attempted however in the way of impertinent restoration. Cole's reverent object was to give what remains of the frescoes and paintings after centuries of, in many cases, positive ill treatment.

When examining proofs of engravings we are constantly impressed, nay, bewildered by his versatility and inventiveness in the adoption of line in order to express the peculiar sentiment and characteristics of each master. In the work of Giotto for instance, we are able to distinguish where that artist went beyond his predecessors, not only in his command of drawing but in his faculty of physical expression. For his contribution to that monumental work "Engravings in Wood" by the members of the Society of American Wood Engravers, Mr. Cole selected a subject by that artist: "The Entombment" from the frescos in the Arena Chapel, Padua.

The imaginative and dramatic force of this creation is extraordinary! With passionate intensity the little group of mourners abandon themselves to a sorrow which, although intensely human, seems refined of all selfish, earthly alloy. A spiritual presence fills the scene; all the pitiful excitement and horror of the crucifixion have subsided; no curious onlookers obtrude upon this place of grief which is holy ground lifted above this earth to where angels join their lamentations. What was the genius that could project externally so rapt a vision, so simple in its elements of expression, yet with so supreme a power to move us? And by what subtle, sympathetic instinct has the engraver reincarnated the picture! It might perhaps be possible to trace the means in terms of art technicalities, but at the expense of the dream, leaving still unexplained the mystery of the inspiration.

After ten years in the hot-house of Italian religious art Mr. Cole went to Holland and breathed for about four years the atmosphere of the practical, every-day life-loving Dutchmen and Flemings. Here he was engaged with the art of men more distinctly Painters, and his problem became largely those of color in light and atmosphere. Tone, color values and textures called for still greater powers of invention for their interpretation by means of their equivalents in black and white lines.

Much has been said about the genius of Turner's technique, the vivacity, purity, hardness



Courtesy of The Century Co.

THE CENTER GROUP OF "THE NIGHT WATCH"

ENGRAVED BY TIMOTHY COLE

FROM THE PAINTING BY REMBRANDT IN THE RIJKS-MUSEUM, AMSTERDAM



Courtesy of the Century Co.

"DIDO BUILDING CARTHAGE"

ENGRAVED BY TIMOTHY COLE
FROM THE PAINTING BY TURNER IN THE NATIONAL GALLERY, LONDON



Courtesy of The Century Co.

"DONA ISABEL"

ENGRAVED BY TIMOTHY COLE

FROM THE PAINTING BY GOYA IN THE NATIONAL GALLERY, LONDON



"THE BLESSING"

ENGRAVED BY TIMOTHY COLE

FROM THE PAINTING BY CHARDIN IN THE LOUVRE MUSEUM

and directness of the handling wherein his brush-work in itself shows such creative faculty. The "Dido Building Carthage" by this artist (in the National Gallery, London) [see page 380] is one of the finest examples of his work in lightness, precision and freedom of touch, and it is enough to say that the engraver has repainted the subject—so piquant, faithful and expressive in his handling.

For absolute charm of color and texture let us turn to the "Dona Isabel" by Goya in the National Gallery, London [see page 381]. The finest and most delicate lace alone is fit to caress so fair a face that appears like the calyx of a flower, so dainty are its tints and texture. The string of pearls unites with the flesh tone of the neck as if they were of one and the same substance, and the richer jewelry of the necklace gives just the touch of color needed to enliven the material, light as air, that breathes from the fair skin beneath. The pearl of head and neck emerges from the brocaded waist and richly colored sleeves as if from a setting of the jeweler's art. Refinement, yet with fulness of vigor and health, unites all the rich elements of this creation into one perfect vision of beauty.

In rendering the quality of vibrating tone the line can not "sing" unless its transitions are delicately modulated. Let us take any one of Cole's subjects to illustrate this—say Rembrandt's "Night Watch," [see page 379] in which out of mysterious shadowy depths and a "light that never was on land or sea" is revealed a perfect wealth of delicate line textures. We will focus upon the hat of the officer most brilliantly lighted. The front of this hat is glowing with palpitating light, which gradually and softly retires into a transparent shadow; this is brought gently in advance of the shadowed part of the feather just behind it, by the device of a more open white dotting. The feather texture is preserved as this shadow softly emerges into its curves of half-shadow and light, again melting into the dark-gray shadow above and striking a little staccato note of pure white against the dark corner of the hat. Below, this shadow with its little trembling semi-tones is kept in retirement by a hair line of the dwindling highlight on the brim of the hat. Down into the gray atmosphere again, into which the dark hair melts with the most subtle feeling for values; thence to the modeling in perfect form of the little planes of the face and onward with infinite delicacy and subtlety to the figure just behind, which unites the two most prominent figures; and so up again to the feather in front of the hat, where the light burns like a flame against a supporting—not line, but delicate almost imperceptible thickening of the open horizontal lines of the hat at their ends—just enough to break the strength of the light in passing between them. The black accents on the

crown, and the white on the brim of the hat are broken with hardly distinguishable but indispensable touches of their edges in their respective adjoining planes in order to keep them in their envelope, while yielding their utmost note of resonance.

Finally note the exquisite finesse in the plate made by Cole of "The Blessing" by Chardin in the Louvre [see page 382]. Note the variety of line cutting used to bring out the various color values.

The foregoing is merely a rough suggestion showing the delight that may be found in the consideration of any square inch of this engraver's loving craftsmanship. The subject just analyzed is a beautiful symphony of rich, glowing light and tremulous palpitating shadow. Mass and details are related in perfect harmony, supporting one another like the instruments in an orchestra.

It was our intention to include for notice in this appreciation a number of examples from the series of English, Spanish and French masters which follow in order, but, though a most fascinating subject, it is impossible to afford the necessary space.

In these translations there is no mistaking the country of a painting's birth, so remarkably is the atmosphere of each nationality suggested. Every painter can be recognized in the various productions of his brush through the sympathetic understanding of the engraver, who has allowed no personal mannerism to interfere with the rights of the painter's individuality.

Since his return from Europe, Mr. Cole has been occupied with the engraving of a number of subjects on a large scale. Among these are the famous "Mona Lisa" of the Louvre, "The Cavalier" by Frans Hals in the Wallace Collection, London, which shows a surprising combination of painter-like treatment and pure engraving quality—Rembrandt's "Holy Family" of the Berlin Museum, Metsu's "Lace Maker" of the Dresden Gallery and a portrait of President Wilson. He has been engaged since October 1916—the date of its publication—upon a series of frontispieces for THE ART WORLD, one of which in particular, after a landscape by George Inness, is of surpassing beauty. The subjects for this new enterprise promise to be the crowning effort of Cole's useful life and of a career which, unlike that of so many successful artists, is unsullied by the production of "pot-boilers" for the mere sake of money-getting. Singularly simple in his habits, he has devoted himself exclusively to perfecting ART and to the treatment of every subject of his graver with the utmost of his powers; and we trust that many coming years may see a continuance of his unique and ever charming production.

George Howes Whittle

